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ABSTRACT

This study examines natural language use in the bilingual, early childhood classroom in the context of: (1) functional patterns of requests and turn allocators used by Spanish-speaking children; (2) formal patterns of requests and turn allocators used by Spanish-speaking children; (3) the use of language alternation to make requests and allocate turns; and (4) the influence on requests and turn allocation of the children's speech partner (teacher or child), language dominance of the speech partner (Spanish or English), and the activity in which they are engaged. Results show the intimate relationship between classroom language use and all other factors influencing a child's daily existence. Use of functional and formal language was marked by both general similarity and appropriate variation in context, and suggests that in a classroom where a variety of language functions are encouraged, children's formal language knowledge is stimulated. Findings on language alternation suggest that the skill is a useful resource in conversations, that children use one language more than another for requesting and allocating during each activity, and that the children usually use a language appropriate to their speech partner's language dominance. (MSE)

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TURN ALLOCATION AND REQUESTIVES: TWO ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN A BILINGUAL EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

Final Report

August, 1983

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Over the past ten years there has been a rapid proliferation of programs for Spanish-speaking children. The demand for suitable curricula and evaluation techniques is pressing. Every day, teachers make decisions about how to teach and evaluate their students. Yet substantive knowledge about the bilingual child's competence in using language in the classroom is extremely limited.

When young Spanish-speaking children enter bilingual early childhood classrooms, they confront a new language and a complex social situation. They must acquire new verbal forms and be able to use them appropriately while they are still gaining competence in their first language. They must learn which language or combination is most effective, and they must also adjust to all the situational factors governing classroom conversations. To help children develop their language abilities, teachers must understand this process.

Traditionally, research on bilingual language learning has dealt primarily with children's knowledge of linguistic form, not their use of language. Only recently, in studies influenced by Hymes' formulation of communicative competence, has the focus shifted. Hymes argues that linguistic competence is too limited a construct to study language use: "Language must be studied in its social context in terms of its organization to serve social ends."[1]

The influence of this theoretical perspective has been reflected most amply in studies of one area of communicative competence in bilingual children, language alternation.[2] The findings from this work have proven of immediate relevance to teachers. They have shown convincingly that bilingual children are aware of a number of contextual factors as they affect language choice

and that they are able to alternate competently and consistently using a unified system of formal and functional rules. Language alternation will undoubtedly continue to be of prime concern in descriptions of bilingual children's language use. However, there is also a need for research that elaborates on these findings and goes beyond them to look at other aspects of communicative competence.

In the past, research on bilingual children has focused on school-age participants. Despite the importance of the early years in language development, 3 to 5-year-old Spanish-speaking children have rarely been studied. Yet these children are entering early childhood programs in ever-increasing numbers. This fact underscores the importance of understanding the development of communicative competence in this setting.

Based on these considerations, these studies focused on two critical aspects of the natural language use of 3-year-old children becoming bilingual: their use of requests and their allocation of turns. These two aspects of communicative competence were chosen because they entail basic language skills crucial to young children's classroom participation. Each constitutes a vital aspect in the process of communication that affects learning between children and their peers and children and their teachers. In these studies, requests were understood to mean language which solicits actions, information, attention and permission. Turn allocation referred to devices which children use to obligate others to respond and, thus, to maintain conversations and move them along. The studies resulted in a description of how the children accomplished each communicative task and also how these relate to and compliment each other.

In accord with Hymes' view, both function and form were considered in describing how the children made requests and allocated turns to fit the

particular contexts of their conversations. For each aspect of communicative competence the children's choice of language (Spanish/English) was analyzed as well as the influence of the situational factors of speech partner (teachers/children), the language dominance of the speech partner (Spanish-dominant/English-dominant), and the activity in which the children engaged.

The main purpose of this work was to extend our understanding of natural language used in the early childhood classroom by young children who are becoming bilingual by describing the ways they accomplish the functional task of making requests and the ways in which they used turn allocators to construct conversations.

Research questions which addressed this purpose were:

1. What are the functional patterns of requests and turn allocators used by Spanish-speaking children in the early childhood classroom?

2. What are the formal patterns of requests and turn allocators used by Spanish-speaking children in the early childhood classroom?

3. How is language alternation used by the children to make requests and to allocate turns?

4. In what ways do the children's speech partner (teacher or child), language dominance of the speech partner (Spanish or English), and the activity in which they are engaged influence their requests and turn allocation?

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The community in which the studies were conducted is a 60-block area on Manhattan's Upper West Side whose language and economic history is one of diversity and constant change. English-speaking middle class families, both black and white, live a few blocks from low income families, many of whom are bilingual or making the transition to bilingualism. Puerto Rican and

Dominican families predominate in the immediate neighborhood of the target school.

The field site for the two studies was the Mayflower Family Center[3], a small, highly respected Headstart program which has served families in the community for over fifteen years. Mayflower offers morning and afternoon sessions to approximately 80 children divided into three classrooms, two for 4-year-olds and one for 3's. The latter class was selected for the studies since it provided the largest pool of potential participants who were Spanish dominant.

There were 15 children each in the morning and afternoon sessions in the 3's room the year the studies were conducted. About 70% of each group was made up of children whose families had migrated to the States from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries. Of this group, some were Spanish-dominant and some English-dominant. About 30% of each group was made up of English-dominants who were Black Americans, West Indians and white children.

There were two teachers in this room, both bilingual. The head teacher, Connie, was a native English-speaker who also spoke Spanish and French. Her assistant, Yolanda, was Dominican, a native Spanish-speaker who also spoke English. Like the other teachers in the program, Connie and Yolanda had organized an open, child-centered classroom. This meant that there was plenty of time for the children to choose and organize their own activities and that activities were based on the children's interests and developmental level.

The approach to language learning in all the classrooms at Mayflower was to emphasize the teaching of concepts in children's first language. In addition, children were encouraged to express themselves in whichever language they felt most comfortable. Thus, though there was no formal bilingual program,

Spanish and English were used frequently in the classroom. Use of Spanish by the children and their families was respected. At the same time, Connie acknowledged the need for the children to learn English and she gradually increased the frequency with which she spoke to them in their second language.

The four target children selected for both studies were all children who 1) were Spanish-dominant (having entered the program in September as Spanish monolinguals), 2) had normal language development, and 3) normal social development. All were in their first year of school. They had entered the program as three-year-olds and were four at the time of video-taping in the spring. Two girls, Nilda and Blanca, and two boys, Javier and Pepe, were selected.

Nilda lived with her mother who was Dominican, her father who was Ecuadorian and a younger brother. The family spoke Spanish together though both parents spoke English well. Nilda had spent the year prior to entering the program in Ecuador living with her paternal grandmother. She was a tall, thin little girl who fussed with her clothes and usually alternated between stubborness and enthusiasm. She spoke fluent Spanish and when she began using English in December surprised the teachers by using many complete sentences. Nilda often played in the housekeeping corner with a group of Spanish-speaking girls, one of whom was Blanca. She also played with individual Spanish and English-speaking boys. Nilda was occasionally ignored by other children, despite her persistent attempts to play with them.

Blanca lived with her mother and grandmother who were Dominican. Though her mother spoke English well, the three spoke Spanish together because the grandmother claimed to know no English. Blanca often spent vacations in the Dominican Republic with her mother and they have subsequently returned to live there. Blanca impressed all who saw her as a spunky and

talkative little girl. Like Nilda, she loved to play in the housekeeping corner where she spent much of her time organizing others, often in a bossy, adult style. She spoke Spanish well, though less clearly than Nilda. She too started speaking English in December. At times, Blanca seemed reluctant to use this language, particularly with the group of boys in the room who spoke English together.

Javier lived with both parents who were Puerto Rican, a younger sister and an older one who attended a bilingual kindergarten and had begun to use English. Javier was cared for after school by an English-speaking babysitter. Though Javier's father spoke English, his mother spoke only Spanish. The family spoke Spanish together. Javier had spent the 10 months prior to entering the program living in Puerto Rico with his family. They hoped to return to live there permanently some day. In the classroom, Javier was active and an organizer like Blanca though, unlike her, he also played alone at times. When he played with a group, it was usually with other boys of mixed language dominance who usually spoke English together. They played table games and enacted Batman and fireman scenes. Javier spoke Spanish fluently and, for the first part of the year, actively avoided English. By January, he had begun to use a few words and within a few months was frequently observed speaking English.

Pepe lived with his mother, a Peruvian who spoke only Spanish. He had spent about a year in Peru living with his parents and grandparents and his mother hoped to return some day to live there permanently. Pepe's afterschool babysitter spoke only Spanish, though her 8-year-old daughter spoke English learned in school. Pepe was a serious, often moody, boy who sometimes used baby talk in Spanish. Unlike the others, Pepe began using English in November. He used words and phrases and experimented with the new language.

Pepe usually played with the same group as Javier, though he was a follower, not an organizer. He liked clay, table games, and dramatic play. His best friend was an English-dominant boy. Pepe played alone at times and occasionally talked to himself.

Though different in terms of their personalities, family backgrounds and play interests, the four children were all normal, bright participants in this early childhood classroom. The study of their use of turn allocators and requests provided a helpful means to look closely at their competence in communicating bilingually.

METHODS

An ethnographic, naturalistic approach was used in the collection, treatment and analysis of the data. During the course of a full school year, the two researchers worked together first as participant observers at the school and later in transcribing and coding the videotaped conversations of the target children.

Beginning in September, we carried out observations in the classrooms approximately one day a week. We took two types of field notes. In the first, we recorded general contextual information about the classrooms with a focus on how the children used language. This information was later used in the selection of appropriate times for taping and in the interpretation of the data. In the second type of field note we recorded detailed descriptions of the language behavior of potential target children, including information about their speech partners, the topics they spoke about, and the activities they engaged in. We also noted our initial impressions of the children's use of requests and turn allocators. This second type of field note was helpful at the conclusion of the first phase of the research in selecting

the four target children. Later, both sets of field notes provided a record of the classroom context and the language used by each target child which was useful in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

As an additional source of information about the context in which the children were learning and using the language, interviews were conducted with parents and the school staff. These took place in the homes of the target children and in the staff lounge at Mayflower. Like the field notes, the information derived from these interviews was used as a means of understanding and interpreting the patterns of requests and turn allocation evident in the children's language use.

At a mid-point in the school year, we made a pilot tape of a non-target child in order to try-out and refine the taping technique, to develop the procedure for transcription and coding, and to establish inter-transcriber and coder reliability. Our recording system entailed the use of a SONY Betamax videotape camera with a mike attached, supplemented by a small SONY TCM 600 tape recorder and a SONY ECM 16 lavalier mike worn in a vest by the target child.

The format for the transcription used a traditional script form which highlighted the target children's turns and requests and integrated relevant nonverbal behavior into the text. Through practice in transcribing and coding this first pilot tape we established our reliability as transcribers and coders at a 90% agreement level.

Between May and July of the same year we completed four and a half hours of tape on each of the four target children, for a total of approximately eighteen hours. Each child's tapes were evenly distributed among the free play, lunch and arrival/departure times. Tapes were done in half-hour segments of classroom time, not more than two in a day and for not more than two days a week.

As each tape was completed we logged it according to the number and length of conversation that occurred in it and the speech partners involved. We also wrote summaries for each tape of the salient features in language use which were evident to us as researchers in the initial viewing session.

We then selected for transcription one and a half hours of tape on each target child relying heavily on the summaries and logs as our guides. The six hours of tapes that we chose included frequent examples of requests and turn allocation by the target children and were generally representative of each target child's conversational style in the classroom.

Once the transcription of the tapes was completed, each researcher worked to identify and code the units of analysis which were the focus of her study. In the beginning of the school year we had worked together as participant observers in the classrooms, and in making and transcribing the tapes. At this point in the research we worked with relative independence to treat and analyze the data on requests and turn allocators. Towards the end of the research project we returned to a collaborative work pattern combining our insights to produce an integrated description of the findings.

For each researcher the treatment of the data followed a hierarchical sequence developed by Erickson and Shultz (1981)[4] moving from larger to smaller units. First, the conversations on each transcript were identified. Then, within each conversation, the sequences of utterances during which allocators and requests were identified and labelled as allocating and requesting episodes. Finally, the particular utterances in which a turn was allocated or a request made was indicated on the transcript. This method of moving from the general to the specific was later helpful in giving us a clear sense of the conversational context within which each turn allocator and request was used.

The data was coded on cards, one for each turn allocator and one for each request. Each card presented: 1) the conversational context within which the request/turn allocator was used, 2) information which identified the target child, 3) the location of the request/turn allocator in the transcripts and 4) information on the variables relevant to the analysis (language choice, form, function, speech partner, language dominance of the speech partner, activity and language alternation). The specific categories that were used in each of these variables will be discussed in more detail in the findings section of this report.

In the final phase of the data analysis we referred closely to our field notes to help us identify emerging patterns for the turn allocators and requests in each child's language. We calculated frequencies for requests and turn allocators in relation to each area of variation. As patterns emerged we interpreted them in the context of classroom conversations by using the information provided by the field notes, previous findings in the literature, the data cards, interviews and transcripts.

In the final phase of our work we brought together the findings produced by the two separate analyses of turn allocation and requests and integrated them to produce a holistic view of the children's communicative competence.

A brief summary of these findings is presented in the following section.

Introduction

Overall, the children made 502 requests and used 567 turn allocators during the six hours of transcribed classroom conversations. Sixty-two percent of the requests were in Spanish and 38% in English. In contrast, 60% of the allocators were in Spanish and 40% in English. The following section presents the findings about these requests and allocators in answer to each of the

research questions. As will be evident, in each area of variation some or all of the categories for requests and turn allocators were similar; in others, the category systems were in part different as they reflected the differing characteristics of the requesting and allocating processes. Wherever possible, comparisons have been made and joint implications drawn.

Research Question 1: What are the functional patterns of requests and turn allocators used by Spanish-speaking children in the early childhood classroom?

Previous research has shown that young children who are learning a second language will make requests and allocate turns frequently and with functional variety if provided with adequate conversational opportunities in the classroom. In this study, the types of requestive functions which were analyzed included: requests for action, attention, information and permission. The most frequently used of these functions was the request for action which made up 51% of the total. Of these, 59% were in Spanish and 41% in English. Requests for attention were the second most frequent function, making up 24% of the total. Fifty-five percent of these requests were in Spanish and 45% in English. The third most frequent were requests for information at 18%, with 70% in Spanish and 30% in English. Requests for permission made of 7% of the total; of these 82% were in Spanish and 18% in English.

The findings from the analysis of turn allocators provided evidence of several similarities in the participants' use of language for allocating and requesting. All together, there were seven functional types of allocators: attention directors, summonses, and requests for action, information, acknowledgement, clarification and elaboration. As with requests, the most frequent function was the request for action. It presented 44% of the total

allocators, 58% in Spanish and 42% in English. Summonses, some of which were classified as requests for action in the study of requests, some as requests for attention, made up the second largest category of allocators at 22%. Of these, 55% were in Spanish and 45% in English. Attention directors, some of which were classified as requests for attention in the analysis of requests and many of which were not requests but served as self-selecting allocators used to initiate conversations, were the third most frequent allocator. They made up 12% of the total; 81% in Spanish and 19% in English. Requests for information, a similar category in the analysis of requests and turn allocators, made up 9% of the total allocators, 59% in Spanish and 41% in English. Of the three remaining types, requests for acknowledgement made up 7% of the total, requests for clarification 5% and requests for elaboration 1%. For the former two types, 54% were in Spanish, 46% in English. For the latter, 88% were in Spanish and 12% in English.

Several joint findings come from a comparison of these orders of frequency. The first and most important is that approximately half of both requests and turn allocators were requests for action. This suggests that for the 3 to 4-year-old bilinguals in this particular classroom, verbal language and activity were frequently interdependent. While some studies in both areas have focused only on the verbal aspects of these processes, these findings suggest that, for this age level in an open classroom setting, consideration of the activities in which the children engaged was essential to understanding the purposes of their language use.

The second joint finding is that requests for attention and attention directors were the second most frequent function.[5] While there is little agreement in the literature about the frequency with which children in early childhood classrooms seek attention as a means of allocating turns or making

requests, in this study it was an important function of language. This finding was also related to contextual factors. As described earlier, this was an open classroom organized on the basis of a child-centered philosophy. Thus, the children spent much of their time talking with other children and with teachers in spontaneously organized conversations. Even though teachers attempted to impose a one-speaker-at-a-time rule on their conversations with the children, in practice the children often spoke while others were speaking. Thus, getting the attention of potential speech partners was a frequent function of the participants' language. The fact that they were often trying to talk to other 3 and 4-year-olds in this busy, noisy classroom added to the necessity of using attention-getting language frequently.

Third, in contrast to studies of older children in which requests for information were frequent, in this study we found that this function was used much less frequently in the classroom. Context again seems relevant. The transmission of information did not appear to be as central in this early childhood classroom as in those at the elementary level.

Research Question 2: What are the formal patterns of requests and turn allocators used by Spanish-speaking children in the early childhood classroom?

Previous research has shown how both developmental and situational factors influence the forms that young children use to make requests and allocate turns. While they normally have learned a variety of forms for each function in their first language by the age of three, and can quickly acquire a second set of forms in their second language, the frequency with which they will use this knowledge again relates to context.

In the present study, the children's requests were divided into ten formal categories. These included imperatives, assertions, intonation questions, vocatives, interrogative word questions, tag questions (including

tag-like forms), deictics, elliptical clauses with relative conjunctions, gutterals and questions with inverted word order. The major finding in relation to these categories was that the children relied on three form types and used the others infrequently. The most frequently used form was the imperative representing 55% of the children's total requests (62% Spanish; 38% English). Assertions at 14% were the second most frequent (72% Spanish; 28% English). Intonation questions at 11% were next (57% Spanish; 43% English). All of the remaining request form types were used infrequently, 5% of the time or less.

The children used thirteen different forms to allocate turns. These included imperatives, vocative/role titles, yes/no questions used with a rising intonation form, one word questions, tag questions, exclamations, appositionals, deictics, assertions, affirmatives, wh-questions, routine gambits and questions consisting of a partial repetition of the preceding turn used with rising intonation. Since many of the forms for turn allocation and requests were the same, it is not surprising that the formal patterns for each function were similar. The most frequently used form was the imperative which made up 50% of the total allocators (59% Spanish; 41% English). Vocatives and role titles were the second most frequent, 10% of the total (55% in Spanish; 45% in English). Yes/no questions using the rising intonation form were third with 8% of the total (50% in Spanish; 50% in English) and one word questions were next with 7% (65% Spanish; 35% English). Of the remaining forms, all were used 5% of the time or less.

A comparison of these two sets of findings makes three points relevant. First, imperatives were used about half the time for requesting and allocating. This, along with the findings on functional language suggests that the children most often used imperatives as requests for action to accomplish these two conversational tasks. Second, for both requesting and turn allocation the

frequency with which the children used a particular form appeared to be related to conversational strategy. For instance, calling out a speech partner's name was an effective way to allocate a turn but proved less useful as a formal device for making requests. Assertions, on the other hand, often proved effective in eliciting a response to a particular request but were not so frequently used by the children as a turn allocating device. Finally, in comparing the forms used by the children to make requests and allocate turns in each language (Spanish and English) it was evident that the children had varied knowledge of forms in both languages. This bilingual competence was an important feature of the children's language use in both areas of the study.

Research Question 3: How is language alternation used by the children to make requests and allocate turns?

For the purpose of this study, language alternation was defined as the act of moving in conversation from one language to another. For both turn allocating and requesting language alternations were categorized according to three types: 1) alternations to begin conversations, which occurred when a target child initiated a new conversation in one language having completed the preceding conversation in the other, 2) alternations within turns, which occurred when a target child made an utterance in one language and followed it with an utterance in the other and 3) alternation between turns, which occurred when the speech partner who spoke immediately before the target child used one language and then the target child in making a request or allocating a turn used the other language.

In the past it has been found that children as young as two years are able to alternate between languages frequently and systematically. In most

reported cases, the children have been exposed to two languages in infancy through parents and caretakers who compliment each other in the language they use with the child. In these studies, the children did not learn to alternate languages under these circumstances. In fact, all had had limited exposure to English as a second language before the year in which the study took place. During that year, they continued to speak Spanish at home and used both Spanish and English as a means of expressing themselves in the classroom.

Given this fact, it was not surprising to find that the children used language alternation sparingly to make requests and allocate turns. In both areas of communicative competence the frequency of language alternation was approximately 12% of the total requests/allocators. The most common type of language alternation was that occurring between turns, followed by within turn alternation, and finally, least frequently, alternations to begin conversations.

It was interesting to note that when the children alternated languages to make requests and allocate turns they used a variety of forms. They were able to move easily from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish, and perhaps most importantly, their use of language alternation reflected an awareness of conversational strategy that was appropriate to the specific context of their talk. Most often the children used the language in which their speech partners were dominant. They usually changed languages appropriately when speech partners changed.

In addition, for both requests and turn allocators the children alternated languages in ways which made the meaning of their talk clearer and their participation in conversation stronger. For instance, they adroitly used language alternation when they were allocating turns or using requestive language to highlight or emphasize the meaning of their

own turn to another child or teacher. They also softened the demand of their requests making their tone more intimately persuasive by requesting in English to a Spanish-dominant speech partner and then repeating the request to the same person in Spanish.

Thus, although the instances when the children used language alternation were relatively few, it was clear that they were capable of employing it as a communicative resource. The reasons for their sparse use of language alternation seemed to be related to two factors, one developmental and the other contextual. Past research suggests that children of this age use language alternation in limited ways because they are still in the process of acquiring their two languages and because of their inability to respond to a number of contextual variables simultaneously. Though there is some disagreement on this issue, it appears that 3 and 4-year-olds most often change languages because of changes in their situation and that they are less able to use alternation for conversational purposes as adults do. When they do use it in this way, it has been reported that they use it to emphasize a turn or make it more persuasive, just as the children in these studies did.

Though both Connie and Yolanda alternated languages, most of the children's classmates did not for the reasons given above. Instead they usually maintained their conversations in their dominant language. This meant that the target children heard language alternation modelled as a speech style by their teachers and rarely among their peers. At home only one parent consistently used language alternation. This apparently resulted in the children adapting their own speech styles to fit the norm of the other children although their conversations clearly demonstrated that they had learned from their teachers, as well as the community at large, how to alternate languages effectively.

Research Question 4: In what ways do the children's speech partner (teacher or child), language dominance of the speech partner (Spanish or English), and the activity in which they are engaged influence their requests and turn allocation?

Previous research has shown that the language use of bilingual children is affected by the type of speech partner, by the language dominance of the speech partner, and by the activity in which the children are engaged. Almost all of this research, however, has been done with school-age children in more structured elementary level classrooms. This research has raised the question if younger children in less structured early childhood classrooms can use language in the same ways.

In these studies, the four participants had the opportunity to talk with a variety of speech partners throughout their day at Mayflower. Their teachers were strong believers in the importance of natural conversation in the classroom as a medium for young children's development in both the first and second language. Throughout the class day, they made themselves easily available to the children for conversation. At the same time, the children also had numerous opportunities to talk with their classmates. Much of the class schedule (and consequently, most of the times that we taped) were devoted to free play. Within the organized classroom context, the children spent most of their time in activities they had organized themselves. There was also variety in the language dominance of the children's speech partners. Both teachers were fluent bilinguals. Most of the children in the classroom were in the early stages of learning their second language and were either Spanish or English-dominant.

For the analysis of the data, speech partners were divided into two categories in terms of both type and language dominance. In the former area, speech partners were classified as teachers or peers.[5] We found that the

four participants made four requests out of every five to their peers. Given the open quality of the classroom and the fact that peers as speech partners outnumbered teachers eight to one, this finding is not surprising. What is interesting is that while the children made requests of all four functional types to both teachers and peers, with the teachers there was a tendency to make action and attention requests to Connie, the English dominant teacher, and information and permission requests to Yolanda, the Spanish dominant teacher. This distinction between speech partners was not reflected in the data on peers. The children seemed to use each teacher differently for requests and only by looking at the patterns used with both teachers was the same functional diversity evident as that demonstrated in their peer interactions. This underlines the importance of differences in the language that children, particularly those becoming bilingual, use with their peers and their teachers, and suggests a note of caution to teachers in evaluating a child's communicative competence on the basis of adult/child interactions.

In the second area of variation relating to speech partners two categories of language dominance were established, Spanish-dominant and English-dominant. We found that the target children usually made their requests and allocated turns in the dominant language of the person with whom they were speaking. They made 87% of their requests to Spanish-dominant speech partners in Spanish and 81% of their requests to English-dominant speech partners in English. In allocating turns, this tendency was even more marked. The children allocated 94% of their turns to Spanish-dominant speech partners in Spanish and 87% of their turns to English-dominant speech partners in English. The difference between requests and allocators in this area may be attributed to the inclusion of teachers in the data on requests. Since Connie and Yolanda were fluent bilinguals, both of whom spoke to the children

in their second as well as their first language, it is likely that the children made their requests "in kind", that is, they used both English and Spanish with both teachers because they knew they would be understood.

Summarizing the findings in this area, it was clear to us that one salient feature of the children's communicative competence was their ability to discern in their choice of language between bilinguals in the early stages of learning a second language and those that were fluent. Again, contextual variables were critical in the ways this competence was displayed.

In the third area of variation, the children's activities were divided into seven categories. These included: dramatic play, organizing dramatic play, table and floor play, toy acquisition, lunch, clean-up and a miscellaneous "other" category. The findings in this area indicated that among the various classroom activities that the children could engage in, there were ones during which they made more requests and allocated more turns than others. It was also evident that the children's choice of language both to make requests and allocate turns was influenced by their activities.

Those activities during which the children were the most frequent in their turn allocation and requests were table and floor play, when the children did most of their artwork, puzzle and board game play (26% of all requests and 30% of all turn allocators), dramatic play (23% of requests and 25% of turn allocators), dramatic play set-up (20% of all requests and 18% of turn allocators), toy acquisition (10% of requests and 8% of turn allocators) and lunch (9% of requests and 8% of turn allocators . A critical difference between these activities and others when the children made fewer requests and allocated fewer turns lay in the amount of negotiating that the children had to do in order to carry out the activity.

For some activities, especially those related to dramatic play the children relied more frequently on Spanish than on English to make their

requests and allocate turns. In other activities, such as table/floor play, lunch and toy acquisition English and Spanish were both used regularly. These differences in language choice related closely to the quality of play for each activity. When the children involved themselves in dramatic play situations, they often acted out scenes drawn from and/or inspired in their home lives. These were intimate, highly personal moments, usually involving other Spanish-dominant children. It was appropriate that much of the interaction was in Spanish. On the other hand, activities like table/floor play and lunch lent themselves to play in mixed groups (Spanish-dominant and English-dominant children). This resulted in a more even distribution between Spanish and English for allocators and requests.

The significant insight drawn from this area of the findings is that the children in these studies used both their first and second languages appropriately in relation to three situational variables: type of speech partner, speech partner's language dominance and activity. This shows the breadth of their communicative competence. When allocating turns and requesting they not only displayed a growing linguistic competence in two languages, but also gave evidence of a high level of social knowledge of the situation. Specifically, they showed an understanding of differentiations in teacher role, made accurate assessments about the relative dominance of others and displayed knowledge of which language and which formal and functional characteristics of languages were most appropriate in different activities.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of these studies was to describe how four young children, all of whom were native Spanish speakers in the early stages of acquiring a second language, used their verbal skills to make requests and allocate turns in a bilingual classroom. Underlying the studies was the assumption that the functions of language, particularly children's language, are best understood when studied in context. By describing the children's language use in relation to situational variables conclusions were generated that have important implications for teachers.

Overall, both studies showed the intimate relationship that exists between classroom language use and all the other factors that influence a child's day-to-day existence both within and outside the classroom. If Blanca, Pepe, Javier and Nilda had attended their first year of school in another early childhood center, with different teachers and different children, their use of requests and allocators would probably have been quite different. What would remain unchanged would be the closeness of fit between their use of language and the context of that language.

More specifically, the children's use of functional and formal language was marked by both general similarity and appropriate variation in context. Imperatives functioning as requests for action and a variety of forms used as attention getters were used most frequently for both requesting and allocating. Both were particularly useful in this open classroom for interacting with others and engaging them in conversations. At the same time, the language that the children used for requesting and allocating was not limited to a few forms and functions. They

systematically used a variety of both in their classroom experiences.

This suggests that in classrooms such as the one in these studies where a variety of language functions are encouraged, children's formal knowledge of language will also be stimulated. If children are given ample opportunity to engage in conversations with different speech partners for different purposes, their formal competence in both languages will naturally follow from their diverse functional use of language. This means that for teachers concerned with young children's bilingual language development, the crucial question is not how formally proficient they are becoming, but how effective is the functional use of their first and second languages.

The findings on language alternation suggest that this skill was a useful resource in the children's conversations. By changing languages - either from Spanish to English or English to Spanish - they were able to enhance the quality of their requesting and allocating. In addition, the importance of teachers and other children as models of language alternation and, by implication, of all language use, was confirmed. Teachers need to be clear about their language learning objectives for their students, make sure that their practice reflects these objectives, and understand that the classroom peer group also provides influential models of language use.

Both studies also found that the children used one language more than the other for requesting and allocating during each activity, that certain functions and forms were used more frequently during some activities than others, and that the children usually used the language appropriate to their speech partner's language dominance. This indicates that the children were able to vary their language appropriately in context in relation to a number of variables. The breadth of their communicative competence was evident in the varied environment of this classroom.

This implies that if teachers focus on children's language use in only one activity or with only one speech partner, they will get only a partial picture of their students' communicative competence. Children need a variety of experiences with different activities and different speech partners to develop their competence. Likewise, teachers' evaluations should be based on observations of children in varied contexts.

In sum, these findings show that in the rich and complex language environment organized by the teachers in the target classroom, the four participants were competent and resourceful language users. By describing their competence in requesting and turn allocating, the two studies together indicate the existence of a unified, bilingual language competence that these four children were in the process of acquiring. This focus on children's strengths and on the systematicity and appropriateness of their language use is an important one for teachers because it helps us see what children can do in order to help them learn more.

Methodological Implications

In every research project insights arise from the procedures for the study as well as the findings that the procedures generate. The present studies were no exception. One such implication relates to the team approach that we used to implement the studies. In the past, most doctoral research has been done either as an individual project or with larger teams. The present studies were not unique, but certainly unusual in having found and followed a middle road.

Thus, in the early and middle stages of our work we were able to reduce by many hours the time devoted to collecting and transcribing our data. For each task, we initially worked at the same time, developing a consistent style and a high level of reliability between us. As our work progressed

to the analysis stage, we benefitted greatly from the heightened awareness that two different, experienced perspectives brought to the task of interpretation. The writing of this joint report allowed us to formally bring together the findings on two aspects of language use in order to produce a unified picture of the participants' communicative competence.

A second procedural recommendation suggested by these studies relates to the use of audio-visual documentation equipment. Most previous research on spontaneous classroom language among young children has used stationary videocameras and/or one-track audio-recording systems. Based on our experience we strongly recommend the use of a mobile video-camera system in classrooms where children are encouraged to move from one activity center to another. We also recommend for early childhood classroom research two-track systems for audio-recording so that both the immediate and the surrounding conversations are recorded. Both these techniques greatly enhanced our understanding of the meaning of the children's talk.

No sharing of the procedural insights gained from these studies would be complete without including a note of caution about the time required to complete a project of this nature. Ethnographic research is well known for its long hours of observation and analysis. The present study required many hours for us to become participant observers in the classroom at Mayflower, more hours to complete the videotapings, home visits, and interviews and many, many more hours to transcribe and analyze the tapes. The time-consuming quality of the procedures is noted here not to discourage other scholars from ethnographic research in the early childhood classroom, but to urge a realistic view as to the time and effort involved.

Despite this reservation, we feel the benefits of ethnographic research in deepening our understanding of children's language use in school and at home are unmatched by other methods. As used by researchers and teachers, ethnographic techniques can provide us with a wealth of sensitive information which is indispensible for teaching.

NOTES

1. Hymes, D. Introduction. In C. Cazden, D. Hymes & V. John (Eds.), Functions of language in the classroom. NY: Teachers College Press, 1972, xviii.

2. In previous studies the term "codeswitching" has been used to refer to a wide variety of linguistic and social behaviors (Gumperz, 1971; Genshi, 1976; Zentella, 1981). For the sake of clarity, this study uses the term "language alternation" to refer to the task accomplished by a child of moving from one language to another in conversation including switching languages within a sentence.

3. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms have been used for the school, its staff and its students.

4. Erickson, F. and Shultz, J. When is a context? Some issues in the analysis of social competence. In J. Green and C. Wallat (Eds.), Ethnography and language in educational settings. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1981, 147-160.

5. In analyzing this question allocators functioning as summonses were distributed between requests for action and attention directors.

6. The analysis of the children's turn allocation in this area of variation focused exclusively on peer conversations.